

Cold Shower

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Summary: Not long into the couple's engagement, Astrid's discovery of Hiccup's current project sends her running for the hills. Set sometime before HTTYD 2, and before my other published stories. Oneshot.

Cold Shower

_A/N-This oneshot grew out of an initial premise that I found too amusing not to write, combined with some ideas for background characters that I've come up with to flesh out the village of Berk as part of my work on my longer stories. Everything that belongs to DW is hereby disclaimed. _

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It's Summer on Berkâ€"that's what the folks who live there call it, anyway. It means the last of the snow has gone, and at the warmest part of the day, the workers shed their outer layers of wool or fur and tend their gardens and water their dragons and their livestock while wearing linen tunics.

Summer doesn't mean no rain, however: there's been a steady drizzle all morningâ€"not heavy enough to be fun, to be an excuse for staying inside and drinking warmed mead or the last of the cider made for the winter seasonâ€"just heavy enough to be aggravating, inconvenient.

Astrid sits working at the loom, her hair wet from the last round of outdoor chores. She could have worn her coat, but it's too thick for this weather so she'd chosen rain dampness instead. She throws the shuttles back and forth, following the pattern her mother started. She's promised to extend the piece by at least half an ell today. She's at three inches so far and she's already bored out of her skull even though the yarn is thick and stout and the work is going

relatively quickly. But Astrid Hofferson is nothing if not disciplined; she'll force herself to get to six inches before she takes a break. As usual when she does domestic tasks, her hands keep moving but her mind starts to wander. Recently it's acquired a nice new path to travel.

It's raining, but it wasn't a few days ago when her mother had Hiccup over for supper to celebrate Astrid's name-day. She'd made her daughter's favorite: fish stew, and in honor of the occasion she'd added generous amounts of the herbs she usually used sparingly owing to their expense (Trader Johan knew as well as anyone what grew on Berk and what didn't, and how much he could get away with charging for the ingredients needed to make Berkian food more palatable). Astrid and her parents and younger siblings had dug right in. Hiccup had to be coaxed to finish his. His reluctance had seemed very weird to Astrid at the time, but it makes perfect sense looking back.

“Hiccup, stirring his stew and not eating it. Her father and brother are making jokes about him being sick and Astrid doesn't get what's so funny”

“Hiccup, pulling her outside for her "name day surprise," and no one else following them out”

“Hiccup, wrapping a blindfold around her eyes, tying it in back with shaking, fumbling fingers, pulling her hair, answering all of her questions with "you'll find out soon”

“Hiccup, wrapping her arms around his skinny waist as they lift into the sky on Toothless, but she doesn't know where they're going, she can't see”

She measures the cloth and decides she's made it far enough. "Mama!" she calls, directing her voice upstairs. "I'm going out. I, um, need to ask Hiccup something. I'll be back soon, and finish the weaving like I promised. Okay?"

"Sure, dear," comes the answer, sarcastic and indulgent. Astrid feels a little humiliated by her obvious failure to disguise her motivation for leaving the house, but she's not bothered enough to change her mind. She slips out the door into the drizzle and walks around the side of the Hoffersons' dwelling to the stable where Stormfly is currently nestled in a mound of dried grass, her wings draped over her current clutch of offspring.

The dragon looks up and chirrs hello as Astrid approaches.

"Hey, girl. Wanna go Hiccup hunting? I know, your favorite," she says, when the Nadder gives her a look that can only mean _Again? Already? You're pathetic. _However, Stormfly knows that disagreeable tasks are often (not always: Astrid's not a _total _sucker) rewarded with treats afterward. She rises carefully and uses her beak to comb grass over her snoozing babies.

Astrid isn't sure where she was expecting Stormfly to take her. Hiccup's been drifting farther from Berk lately, his interest in exploration closely matching the firmness with which his father requests his attendance at various arbitration meetings and formal ceremonies. When they touch down outside the Thorstons' cottage,

Astrid realizes she had hoped to find him off somewhere rather private. She shoves back disappointment, swings herself out of the saddle and her boots hit the ground with a splat.

Stormfly looks at her rider expectantly. Astrid whips her wet braid off her shoulder and it thumps against her back.

"Forget it," she says. "Travel within the town doesn't count."

Stormfly ruffles her wings in petulance and takes off again, heading back to the dryness of the Hofferson stable and the grateful squeaks of her babies.

"Spoiled princess," Astrid complains to her dragon's quickly-disappearing rear end.

"Hey," Tuffnut says as she approaches the gate. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for Hiccup. Is he around?"

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Are you kidding? His betrothed, his intended, whatever you want to call it. Now let me in."

"Heh," says Tuffnut. "I bet you like those words a lot, don't you. In case you didn't know, me and Ruff and Snot had a bet going that you'd finally get tired of waiting and drag him to the table with a marriage contract all filled out, not the other way around. Didn't turn out well for me. I lost a month's worth of dragon-feeding chores to my own sister."

"She always was the smart one," retorts Astrid. "Are you going to let me through, or not?"

Tuffnut bows exaggeratedly and ushers her through the gate. Astrid ignores him and walks straight by the house, toward the carpenter's shop in the back where she can hear sawing and pounding. There's a shingle over the door, with runes spelling out "Thorston and Sons" burned into it. The sign is an ancient, hopeful fiction. Neither Tuff nor his sister has been allowed into the shop in over fifteen years. Pine-Nut Thorston's best bet now is for one of his twins to marry someone who can be trusted around gouges, chisels, and lathes.

Hiccup's back is to her as she enters the shop. He's wearing his normal leggings and a light tunic, belted at the waist, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. The air outside is faintly chilled from the rain, but he's sweated through the back of his shirt.

She's hesitant to make a sound; he concentrates so hard when he's working that he's easily startled and she doesn't want him to lose another appendage. But Pine-Nut Thorston is facing her at the other end of the big work table and he looks up from his carving project.

"Hello, Astrid," he says. "What a nice surprise."

Hiccup turns around. He tenses a bit when he recognizes her, as though she's stumbled on something she wasn't supposed to see. His face is already pink from working, however, so it doesn't give her any hint of whether he's uncomfortable with her presence in the shop.

"Um, hi, Astrid," he says. "Er, what are you doing here?"

"Taking a break from weaving," Astrid says.

Hiccup looks at her skeptically. "Okay, do you need something?"

"No." Astrid's upset by the implied rejection. Doesn't he want her there?

"Ah, young love," interjects Thorston. "It addles the brains, does it not. I remember the days," he goes on to nostalgically describe a scene from the blessed time before his goddess of a wife died and left him with two incorrigible children to rear. According to Astrid's own father, no one on Berk has ever had the heart to tell him that the woman about whom he still spins poetry was in fact crazier than a yak with brain rot.

She takes advantage of the distraction, planting herself on a stool alongside the wall farther into the shop. It gives her a better view of Hiccup.

He tosses her a piece of wood freshly shaped on the lathe, and a piece of sandpaper. "Here. If you don't have anything specific to do, smooth this down." He picks up a pencil and starts sketching lightly on a slab lying on the table.

Astrid sets to work, sneaking a glance at Hiccup every few seconds. She has no idea what he's constructing, but he's fun to watch when he's really focused on a project. He makes faces, and mutters to himself, and absently runs his fingers through his hair, leaving it standing on end.

"And how are the wedding preparations going on your side, lass?" asks Thorston.

Astrid thinks of the pretty painted chest recently dug out from under the bed in the room she shares with her sister. It's half full of things she'd been forced to work on throughout her childhood and adolescence, despite her repeated claims that she'd never marry: she was a _warrior, _dammit, she was going to die young fighting dragons in the service of Berk. Her protests never seemed to have much effect. Her mother would just plop her down with a needle and thread and inform her placidly that Viking warriors needed to be able to sew as well as fight. In revenge, instead of paying attention to her embroidery, she'd drift off into daydreams, trying to imagine the most impressive, heroic way to die. She'd settled on getting bitten in half by a Monstrous Nightmare. Such a death would possess the perfect balance of drama and gore. They'd put it in the Book of Dragons, and the name of Hofferson would be honored in sung epics performed for untold numbers of future generations.

So far things haven't worked out the way she'd planned.

"They'reâ€|going," she says. "My mother just measured me again, said I'll need a dress and a new set of clothes appropriate for a married woman." She won't wear them. The wedding dress, sure; the frumpy skirts and aprons, never. "If anyone needs to find me between now and next Spring, I'll be at the Hofferson loom." She intended it to sound light and humorous, but Hiccup winces.

"Glad to know you're so excited about our wedding," he responds. He picks up another long piece of wood and carries it to the lathe, fastens it in. "Is this right, Mr. Thorston?"

The man glances over. "Aye, you've got it." He looks at Astrid and winks. "Quick learner, this one."

Astrid flushes and busies herself with the sanding. She can't tell Hiccup in front of Pine-Nut Thorston that she _is _excited about the wedding, but not because it's a wedding, or because she'll be crossing the invisible line that grants her a different status in the eyes of the village. _That _idea is still mildly horrifying. She's seen what always seems to happen to the girls that get married. They get boring and stodgy, they start to care more about housework and less about flying dragons, and soon most of them are buried under piles of dirty diapers and lustily squalling children.

Yet here sits Astrid, decidedly uneaten by a dragon, engaged to the chief's son, her chances of going out in a fiery blaze of glory reduced markedly from what they were five years ago.

She hears the clink of Hiccup's metal foot on the floor of the shop and her childhood fantasies suddenly lose some of their charm.

Hiccup finishes his work at the lathe. He brushes wood peelings from his front, turns and smiles at her.

â€|__they're landing, and sitting, and Hiccup is holding her blindfolded face in his hands, kissing her again and again, swearing he's loved her since they were kids and always willâ€|__

â€|__the blindfold comes off, they're on a high point at the far end of Berk, Toothless' cove on one side and the ocean on the otherâ€|__

_...there's a piece of parchment in her lap, it's a marriage contract, all the signatures in place except for hersâ€|he's apologizing repeatedly for making her wait so long, he'd spent ages trying to convince her parents to accept such generous termsâ€|she's not sure whether to feel flattered or insulted, so instead she starts laughing hysterically, until he looks worriedâ€|__

Hiccup carries the turned piece of wood back over to the bench. "Here's another one." He takes the piece she's been sanding and hands her the new piece. He lifts the marked-up slab from the table and examines it critically; Astrid sees its shape, the pencil lines on its surface indicating where the cuts and carvings will go.

She runs the sandpaper over her fingers instead of the wood she holds and stifles a yelp.

Mother of all the gods. He's making a bed. The penciled design is intricate, incorporating her favorite flowers. He's making _their _bed. They'll be married, and go upstairs to that bed, and take off their wedding clothes, and he'll _touch _her.

“Hiccup, shyly pulling her into his lap, holding her close as they watch the sun sink lower and lower in all its orange-and-purple glory” his fingers press gently into the fabric of her blouse, never venturing anyplace even remotely inappropriate, though she wishes they would—

She bends over and scrubs vigorously, her face growing hotter and hotter. She tries to think about something else, anything but the bed. How about dragon racing? No, that just brings up memories of chasing Hiccup's lean, leather-covered butt. Bad choice of distraction. Possibly the worst.

"Are you okay?" Hiccup is kneeling in front of her, confused and concerned. His fingertips brush her hand as he takes the post from her and she can't breathe anymore.

"Leave her be, lad," chortles Pine-Nut Thorston. "I think she just realized what she's helping you build."

This is the last straw. "I'm—bothering you," says Astrid thickly, though it's more plausible the exact reverse is true. "I'm no good with woodworking, I'll only mess this up. I'll—see it when it's done."

She walks stiffly out of the shop, tuning out Pine-Nut Thorston's deep chuckling and Hiccup's call of "Hey, wait!" Once past the gate, she starts to run and doesn't stop.

She runs through the village, past her own house, forgetting about the weaving. She runs past the Mead Hall, over the land bridge connecting the town to the rest of Berk. It's still raining; she's getting soaked, but she doesn't care. Her stomach starts to hurt from the quick pace but she ignores it. She keeps on running into the forest until she finds the shallow gorge with the creek the Berkian kids play in on warm days. Today is not nice enough for a swim, but she's hot, she's burning, no one is there except her and she's grateful.

The creek is higher than usual, swollen from the rain and the runoff from the last of the melted snow. She takes off her boots and socks and wades into the calf-deep water, wincing when the frigidity of it seizes her muscles. She sits down quickly; the breath leaves her lungs. The coldness clawing at her back, belly and groin is almost unbearable and therefore perfect.

Astrid pulls her knees up against her chest and lets the water rush past, hoping the chill will carry all thought from her brain. Hiccup's a good boy, too nice, really; beneath all the rule-breaking and sarcasm he's a total prude. He does want her. She could feel him against her as she sat in his lap watching the sun sink low. But he won't do anything about it, and won't for months yet. No, he'll just keep driving her crazy, unconsciously stroking her arm as they sit next to each other in the Mead Hall during festival celebrations, playfully bumping into her as he walks her home in the dark afterward, mocking the drunken staggering of their

friendsâ€|

â€|_they land back at the Hoffersons'; there's kissing and crying and Hiccup chokes helplessly for breath after Astrid's father claps him on the back in congratulationâ€""You can't go yet," he says, and to Astrid's astonishment Hiccup lets them ply him with mug after mug of ale until even her brother's lame jokes make him howl with laughterâ€|_

_â€|s__he takes him back to his own house afterward, their progress up the hill halted when he suddenly falls to his knees in the grass and regurgitates everything he's consumed in the last six hoursâ€|_

_â€|__Stoick opens the door, and instantly knows what's happened; he hauls his drunk son inside and gives Astrid a huge bear hugâ€|"Welcome to the family, lass," he says in a gravelly voice, and his eyes ARE moist even though he'll deny it till doomsdayâ€|_

Still not cold enough. Astrid pinches her nose and lies down in the rushing, freezing water, submerging herself completely. Sharp needles prick her scalp and ears. Her head starts to ache. Long seconds pass and she's deaf, blind, mindless.

Finally she can't hold her breath anymore and bursts out of the water, scrambling to her feet, almost falling because she can't feel her toes. She climbs dripping out of the creek and rings the water from her skirt and hair. The rain has stopped. A light breeze is blowing through the woods and she's shaking. She puts her damp socks back on with stiff, achy hands and steps into her boots, then heads back toward the village at a light trot. She'll still be wet when she gets to the house but at least her lips won't be blue and scare her mother.

It occurs to her as she jogs home that Hiccup probably wouldn't be able to keep up with her on a trip like this. He _can _run, but his prosthetic isn't designed for distance and he's not in the shape he was in when he was fifteen, before he lost his leg. Back then he couldn't use weapons worth a damn, but he could cross the island on foot just fine. He had to when he was still hiding Toothless, in order to reach the cove after dragon training and be back in time for supper. Now, though, on the odd occasion when they have to walk a long way, he tires before she doesâ€"too quickly, she thinks, for someone who's only twenty and otherwise healthy, even accounting for the inefficiency of the prosthetic. It's dangerous for him not to be mobile. Maybe she can talk him into designing a foot that will allow him to run better. Dragon flight can't get you everywhere. You never know what might happen; when you might have to run for your life.

She keeps going and soon the town comes into view. The clouds are parting finally, casting weird, unexpected shadows on the roofs of the houses. Some aspects of life on Berk may feel stifling, but the sight of the village bathed in the eerie sun glow after a storm never fails to stun Astrid with its beauty. She's seen plenty of other islands by now, other villages, but theirs is the finest. It's a popular quip on Berk that it snows nine months of the year here and hails the other three, but that's not true. Not even close. It only hails one month; the other two can be pretty nice.

She reaches the stable next to the Hofferson house. Stormfly is dozingâ€"Astrid wakes her by dangling a piece of chicken in front of her nostril and she snaps it up, looking gratified.

"That's for earlier," Astrid apologizes, and continues on into the house. Someone has thrown wood on the fire and it's blazing pleasantly. She holds her hands out toward the hearth and rubs them together to get rid of the last bit of chill.

"Hi, dear," says her mother. "Wow, you're damp from head to toe. Was it raining very hard?"

"I guess," replies Astrid. "I'll get back to the weaving in a minute, after I put on drier clothes. Sorry I took so long to come home."

Her mother gives her a knowing look. "And how is your betrothed?"

"He's great," says Astrid, and heads upstairs to change.

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Hiccup comes by in the evening after supper. He politely yet emphatically refuses Papa Hofferson's proffered mug of mead. He's wearing the newest version of his wingsuit. Astrid hasn't made up her mind whether she's okay with it; she's perplexed by the complicated buttons and buckles and straps and pokes at them every chance she gets. She sees Toothless waiting a short distance from the door and guesses Hiccup plans to take her for another dragon rideâ€"she remembers her earlier worry about his stamina and suggests a walk instead, thinking to boost the amount of distance he'll cover on foot that day. Hiccup looks puzzled and a little annoyed but agrees.

They wander aimlessly for awhile, chatting, holding hands. Pine-Nut Thorston's stories of his youth are even weirder than Gobber's, says Hiccup; he's not convinced the crazy is restricted to the maternal line like everyone claims.

Eventually they find themselves on the highest wooden platform over the docks. It's the place where Astrid once found Hiccup despondent, nearly ready to give up on everything, and pushed him into doing something crazy and wonderful instead. They sit down next to each other, feet dangling over the edge of the platform. Toothless plops down behind them with a grunt; no doubt he would rather they had gone flying. Astrid watches the faint stars that are beginning to appear in the evening sky.

"I'm sorry about the bed," Hiccup says after a minute. "It wasn't supposed to be a surprise. I just didn't want you to see it until I was sure it was going well."

Astrid shuffles closer to him until their hips are touching. "It looks nice. Those are my favorite flowers. You knew without asking."

His arm wraps around her and she turns sideways, pushing her eyes and nose into the exposed skin under his jaw. He smells good, faintly sweaty and sawdusty from his hours in the workshop, but good just the same. She makes a trail of kisses around the side of his neck and up

behind his ear. His hair tickles her face. It feels cool in contrast to the warmth of his skin. She reaches up to unbuckle his shoulder armor and he lets her remove it. She puts it down behind them and hugs him to her tightly.

They'll be married in the upcoming Spring, when the hibernating animals start to wake and the first tendrils of green start to poke through the melting icy winter crud. It feels so far in the future, and yet at the same time it's approaching too quickly. Just one more winter like this, like normal, she thinks; all the ones following will be different.

She mumbles into Hiccup's shoulder and he leans away from her. "What did you say?"

"I said, don't ever change."

"Oh." He rubs the skin of her arm above the fur bracer, squeezes gently. "I won't if you won't."

"Deal," she says. She offers her hand to shake, to seal the agreement; he takes it, she grips him hard and hits the button on his chest with her unrestricted hand. His back fin whips open.

"Hey!" he protests. He yanks himself free and rewinds the spring coil.

"I promised not to change," she says. He smiles in exasperation. He knows he can't argue with her logic.

"You certainly did. I assume, based on this same promise, you plan to atone for the associated bit of violence?"

"I'll make it up to you as far as you'll let me, you shy sheep, you," and she reaches for him again. This will end as it always ends, with him pulling away from her reluctantly, both of them breathing hard and very uncomfortable, but they can deal with it, Astrid tells herself. She can, anyway; she already did so once today, and the creek isn't the only option available.

"I'm not shy," Hiccup says, "I'm cautious."

"Whatever. Come to me."

He does.

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file.